

Is the Power-Law Really the Law of War?

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Abstract: The power-law specification of war deadliness is ubiquitous. This study shows instead that the log-logistic distribution provides a superior fit for war fatality data and that its use yields conflicting inferences about whether a decline in war's intensity occurred in the mid-twentieth century. Using Correlates of War data merged with estimates of country population totals, the relative intensity of major international wars fought between 1816 and 2007 are modeled with each specification. The log-logistic fit accounts for more than twice the variation in the data and provides more efficient predictions of both moderate and extreme war intensities. This calls for a reevaluation of the unqualified use of the power-law in the study of war.

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